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PROGRAMME, THE ENVIRONMENT FUND AND ADMINISTRATIVE AND OTHER BUDGETARY MATTERS

Status report on implementation of the Global Programme of Action for the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-based Activities

Report of the Executive Director

Summary

The present report, prepared in pursuance of Governing Council decisions 19/14 A, B and C, discusses UNEP's progress to date, as secretariat of the Global Programme of Action for the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-based Activities, in support of implementation of the Global Programme of Action. It comprises information on (a) establishment of the Global Programme of Action Coordination Office, (b) regional implementation of the Global Programme of Action, (c) inter-agency and international cooperation, (d) the clearing-house mechanism and (e) Global Programme of Action-related assessments.

Suggested action by the Governing Council

The Governing Council may wish to:

Endorse the General Assembly's recommendation in resolution 51/189 that Governments intensify their efforts, within the context of their representation in governing bodies of other agencies and organizations within the United Nations system, to ensure that those agencies and organizations have the mandate and the needed financial and human resources to undertake their responsibilities as lead agencies to coordinate the development of the Global Programme of Action clearing-house mechanism for specific pollutant source categories, as defined in the General Assembly resolution;

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Request the Executive Director, in cooperation with Governments and United Nations and other relevant organizations, to explore the feasibility of UNEP convening a global conference by the year 2000, to address sewage as a major land-based source of pollution affecting human and ecosystem health;

I. BACKGROUND

1. Governments adopted the Global Programme of Action for the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-based Activities (GPA), 1/ and the Washington Declaration, 2/ in November 1995. They also designated UNEP as the secretariat for the Global Programme of Action, requesting that it (a) promote and facilitate implementation of the Global Programme of Action at the national level and at the regional, including subregional, level through, in particular, a revitalization of the regional seas programme; and (b) play a catalytic role with other organizations and institutions in the implementation of the Global Programme of Action at the international level.

2. UNEP's Governing Council subsequently adopted decisions 19/14 A, B and C on implementation of the Global Programme of Action, in which, inter alia, it (a) endorsed the proposed role of UNEP as the secretariat of the Global Programme of Action; (b) accorded priority to implementation of the Global Programme of Action in UNEP's programme of work; (c) requested the Executive Director to incorporate Global Programme of Action activities in all regional seas programmes and to establish links with other regional plans, programmes or conventions for protection of the marine and freshwater environments; and (d) requested the Executive Director to continue strengthening UNEP's integrated management related to the freshwater and marine environment for implementation of the Global Programme of Action.

3. The present document summarizes UNEP's actions to date in its role as the secretariat of the Global Programme of Action, emphasizing those actions accomplished since the nineteenth session of the Council.

II. ESTABLISHMENT OF THE GLOBAL PROGRAMME OF ACTION COORDINATION OFFICE (COUNCIL DECISIONS 19/14 A AND B)

4. UNEP accepted the offer of the Government of the Netherlands to host the Global Programme of Action Coordination Office in The Hague. It was officially opened on 24 November 1997, becoming operational in January 1998. The initial personnel comprised three Professional officers (including two seconded by the Dutch Government) and one General Service staff member. As noted in the Executive Director's report on the institutional aspects of implementation of the Global Programme of Action (UNEP/GC.19/INF.4, para. 28), the eventual total will comprise six Professional and four General Service staff members.

5. The Coordination Office prepared a draft "strategy paper", identifying proposed actions, and presented it at three informal consultations in 1998: with Governments (13 and 14 May), with UNEP and non-UNEP regional seas

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1/ UNEP(OCA)/LBA/IG.2/7.

2/ UNEP(OCA)/LBA/IG.2/6, annex II.

programmes (24-26 June), and with non-governmental organizations (23 and 24 November). The paper was also discussed at an ad hoc meeting of the ACC Subcommittee on Oceans and Coastal Areas (22-24 June).

III. REGIONAL IMPLEMENTATION OF THE GLOBAL PROGRAMME OF ACTION (COUNCIL DECISIONS 19/14 A AND B)

6. In the Washington Declaration, Governments expressed their commitment to protect and preserve the marine environment from the impacts of land-based activities, and their intention to cooperate on a regional basis to coordinate efforts for maximum efficiency and to facilitate action at the national level.

7. A series of regional technical workshops have been convened during 1996-1998 in the framework of the UNEP regional seas programme as a means of strengthening national capabilities for protection of the aquatic environment from land-based activities, and to promote regional and subregional cooperation. Among the aims were (a) to finalize regional overviews of land-based activities, (b) to agree on development of the regional components of the clearing-house mechanism and (c) to reach agreement on regional programmes of action to address the impacts of land-based activities on the aquatic environment.

8. The workshop participants included government-designated experts and representatives of United Nations agencies, international financing institutions, regional development banks, the private sector and non-governmental organizations. A list of these workshops, and the priority pollutants/sources identified at each workshop, is given below.

Region	Priority pollutants/sources identified, in order of priority
South-East Pacific a/ (Lima, 18-21 November 1996) (5 States) Follow-up regional workshop (Viña del Mar, Chile, 19-22 October 1998)	Sewage Oils (hydrocarbons) Heavy metals Persistent organic pollutants (POPs)
ROPME Sea Area/Red Sea and Gulf of Aden (Bahrain, 2-5 December 1996) (14 States) Follow-up ROPME Sea Area workshop (Kuwait, 8 and 9 June 1997)	(a) Red Sea and Gulf of Aden: Physical alteration and destruction of habitats Sewage Nutrients and sediment mobilization (b) ROPME Sea Area: Oils (hydrocarbons) and combustion products Physical alteration, sediment mobilization and destruction of habitats Sewage and nutrients Litter Atmospheric deposition Persistent organic pollutants Heavy metals Radioactive substances
East Asian Seas (Bangkok, 30 April-3 May 1997) (10 States)	Sewage Agriculture Industry Urban run-off Habitat modification
Eastern Africa (Zanzibar, 6-9 October 1997) (9 States)	Domestic sewage Solid domestic waste Habitat degradation Agrochemical pollution Industrial waste pollution
South Asian Seas (Colombo, 22-25 October 1997) (5 States)	Sewage Litter
West and Central Africa (Abidjan, 25-28 November 1997) (21 States)	Sewage Physical alteration and habitat degradation Urban and domestic run-off Agriculture Industry Litter Oil (hydrocarbons) Sediment mobilization Heavy metals
Upper South-West Atlantic a/ (Brasilia, 30 September-2 October (1998) (3 States)	Domestic sewage Industrial sewage Physical alteration and habitat degradation Oils (hydrocarbons)

a/ See Council decision 19/14 B.

9. Regional workshops are planned in 1999 for the North-West Pacific and the South Pacific. It will be noted that sewage has been identified by Governments in all the regional workshops to date as the major land-based source of pollution affecting human and ecosystem health.

IV. INTER-AGENCY COOPERATION IN IMPLEMENTING THE GLOBAL PROGRAMME OF ACTION (COUNCIL DECISIONS 19/14 A, B AND C)

10. Effective inter-agency and international cooperation is fundamental for successful, cost-effective implementation of the Global Programme of Action. It is also fundamental for enhancing capacity-building, technology transfer and cooperation, and financial support. Effective implementation of the Global Programme of Action also requires support from appropriate international agencies and organizations.

11. To this end, the Governing Council invited the ACC Subcommittee on Oceans and Coastal Areas to perform the functions of an inter-agency steering committee for the Global Programme of Action, in collaboration with the ACC Subcommittee on Water Resources, and in cooperation with other relevant agencies and bodies.

12. At an informal meeting held in Stockholm from 6 to 8 August 1997, the ACC Subcommittee on Oceans and Coastal Areas agreed, inter alia, that no new group should be convened to perform the functions of a steering committee for the Global Programme of Action to review implementation of the Global Programme of Action. At a subsequent joint informal meeting held in Stockholm on 12 and 13 August 1997, the ACC Subcommittee on Oceans and Coastal Areas and the ACC Subcommittee on Water Resources acknowledged the need for a common format and method for reporting on implementation of the Global Programme of Action, for use by both ACC Subcommittees, as well as the need for agencies to review the relevant annexes of the implementation plan for the Global Programme of Action to determine any needed refinement. They also agreed to discuss how non-governmental organizations could support implementation of the Global Programme of Action, to determine the tasks to be undertaken by specific agencies in facilitating support of the Global Programme of Action, and to call for examination by all agencies of their possible responsibilities in supporting implementation of the Global Programme of Action, and of the Global International Waters Assessment (GIWA) project as a supportive activity.

13. The ACC Subcommittee on Oceans and Coastal Areas met again in Lisbon from 20 to 23 January 1998 and agreed that the main role of the Steering Committee for the Global Programme of Action is to facilitate the provision of necessary inputs to the intergovernmental meetings to review the Global Programme of Action. For this purpose, the Steering Committee could periodically review:

(a) The status of implementation of the Global Programme of Action at the national, regional and global levels;

(b) The experience gained, problems encountered and assistance required for implementation of the Global Programme of Action;

(c) The plans for forthcoming periods (annual, biannual, medium-term, long-term);

(d) The roles and responsibilities of individual partner agencies (including those comprising the Steering Committee) in supporting the implementation of the Global Programme of Action, with specific reference to:

(i) The status of implementation of regional programmes of action to deal with impacts of land-based activities on the marine environment;

(ii) The status and updating of each source-category component of the data directory for the Global Programme of Action clearing-house, as envisaged in paragraphs 43-45 of the Global Programme of Action;

(e) Ways and means of facilitating effective support for the implementation of the Global Programme of Action through strengthened cooperation between UNEP and its partner agencies;

(f) The modalities for governmental participation in the process.

14. Working with and through the expert groups for each pollutant source category, the Global Programme of Action Steering Committee will also coordinate the basic design and structure of the clearing-house data directory, and its linkages to information delivery mechanisms. The Committee will also be responsible for establishing a common format for individual source-category components and for cross-referencing among components.

15. It is noted, however, that although the various tasks and responsibilities have generally received agreement from the agencies comprising the Global Programme of Action Steering Committee, the modalities and operational details of carrying out these tasks and responsibilities have not yet been finalized.

16. An ad hoc meeting of the ACC Subcommittee on Oceans and Coastal Areas (The Hague, 22 and 23 June 1998) suggested that the first intergovernmental review of the implementation of the Global Programme of Action could take place in 2000 or 2002. It was suggested that an ad hoc intergovernmental review in 1999 (possibly in conjunction with the seventh session of the Commission on Sustainable Development) would also be very useful.

V. GLOBAL PROGRAMME OF ACTION CLEARING-HOUSE (COUNCIL DECISIONS 19/14 A AND C)

17. The Global Programme of Action recommended the establishment of a clearing-house, as a priority for mobilizing experience and expertise, including facilitation of effective scientific, technical and financial cooperation, and capacity-building.

18. At the global level, the clearing-house is being structured around organizations responsible for pollutant source categories, as specified in the Global Programme of Action and further elaborated in United Nations General Assembly resolution 51/189 on institutional arrangements for the

Global Programme of Action. At the global level, the clearing-house will ensure access to the body of international scientific and technical information and experience. A major regional clearing-house component is also necessary to facilitate user access and to adapt information to local circumstances. The regional seas programmes and commissions responsible for regional sea areas also provide a regional institutional framework for clearing-house activities.

19. To this end, General Assembly resolution 51/189 calls upon States to take action in the governing bodies of relevant intergovernmental organizations and programmes to ensure they take the lead in coordinating the development of the clearing-house mechanism with respect to the following pollutant source categories (not listed in order of priority): 3/

(a) Sewage - the World Health Organization;

(b) Persistent organic pollutants - the Inter-Organization Programme for the Sound Management of Chemicals, the International Programme on Chemical Safety and the Intergovernmental Forum on Chemical Safety;

(c) Heavy metals - the United Nations Environment Programme, in cooperation with the Inter-Organization Programme for the Sound Management of Chemicals;

(d) Radioactive substances - the International Atomic Energy Agency;

(e) Nutrients and sediment mobilization - the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations;

(f) Oils (hydrocarbons) and litter - the International Maritime Organization;

(g) Physical alterations, including habitat modification and destruction of areas of concern - the United Nations Environment Programme.

20. UNEP assisted WHO, IOC and IMO in preparing papers outlining their proposed activities in respect of each pollutant source category. As requested by the Governing Council, UNEP's Executive Director also requested other agency heads to give priority to the implementation of the Global Programme of Action within their work programmes. Several agencies have already pledged their commitment. Three agencies (WHO, IAEA and IOC) have adopted resolutions in support of the Global Programme of Action. Further, WHO drafted a report on development of a sewage information clearing-house.

3/ The agency participation in the implementation of the Global Programme of Action, and the General Assembly resolution as a whole, were subsequently endorsed by the member States of UNESCO's Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC). IOC has expressed its interest in cooperating with the agencies designated to take the lead in dealing with the clearing-house source categories for oils (hydrocarbons) and litter (IMO) and nutrients and sediment mobilization (FAO).

Both WHO and IMO, however, indicated their inability to undertake the lead coordination role for their respective pollutant source categories without additional financial resources. The next occasion at which the matter can be discussed by the FAO Council is at its November 1998 session.

21. As noted above, agencies are in various stages of taking up their lead agency roles in the pollutant source categories. A continuing constraint for most agencies, however, is the fact that the clearing-house goals of the Global Programme of Action, including lead agency responsibilities, have not necessarily been included in their agency work programmes. As a result, sufficient financial and human resources to undertake their lead agency roles have not been forthcoming in many cases. Consequently, a major contribution of Governments, within the context of their representation on the governing bodies of the lead agencies, would be to ensure the agencies have the clear mandate and the needed financial and human resources to undertake their lead agency responsibilities in a timely and efficient manner.

VI. ASSESSMENT OF THE STATE OF OCEANS AND COASTAL WATERS (COUNCIL DECISIONS 19/14 A AND C)

22. The Global Programme of Action identified a need for regular reviews of the state of the world marine environment at the global level, and recommended the establishment of linkages with international programmes monitoring and assessing the state of the marine environment and relevant river systems. The Global Programme of Action specifically identified the IMO/FAO/IOC/WMO/WHO/IAEA/United Nations/UNEP Joint Group of Experts on the Scientific Aspects of Marine Environmental Protection (GESAMP) as a mechanism for developing scientific assessments of the impacts of land-based pollution on the marine environment.

22. On the basis of a UNEP proposal presented at its twenty-sixth session, held in Paris from 25 to 29 March 1996, GESAMP established a Working Group on Marine Environmental Assessments, designating UNEP as the lead agency. UNEP subsequently convened the first meeting of the Working Group in Geneva on 17 and 18 May 1996. At its twenty-seventh session (Nairobi, 14-18 April 1997), GESAMP considered plans for undertaking an assessment of the state of the marine environment by the year 2002, and an assessment of land-based activities by the year 1999.

23. The regional overviews of land-based activities affecting the aquatic environment, prepared in the framework of Global Programme of Action regional workshops within UNEP's regional seas programme, constitute basic material for the GESAMP global assessment of land-based activities. Preparation of this global assessment is under way, through meetings of the Working Group on Marine Environmental Assessments and its Editorial Board, to consider, review and improve the draft biennial reports on the state of the marine environment and the global report on land-based activities.

24. GESAMP also agreed to establish cooperative mechanisms with the Global International Waters Assessment (GIWA) project in areas of mutual interest within both assessment exercises.

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PROGRAMME, THE ENVIRONMENT FUND AND ADMINISTRATIVE AND OTHER BUDGETARY MATTERS

Status report on implementation of the Global Programme of Action for the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-based Activities

Report of the Executive Director

Corrigendum

The last four paragraphs should be numbered 22, 23, 24 and 25.

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PROGRAMME, THE ENVIRONMENT FUND AND ADMINISTRATIVE AND OTHER BUDGETARY MATTERS

Biosafety-related issues: implementation of Governing Council decision 19/16

Report of the Executive Director

Summary

The present document, submitted in accordance with Governing Council decision 19/16 of 7 February 1997, on biosafety, describes the relevant activities completed by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). These included publication of UNEP International Technical Guidelines for Safety in Biotechnology; implementation of the "UNEP/GEF Pilot Biosafety Enabling Activity Project" with two components (support to 18 countries for the preparation of national biosafety frameworks and support to eight regional workshops on biosafety); operationalization of the International Register on Biosafety; and initiation of other biosafety-related activities.

Suggested action by the Governing Council

The Governing Council may wish to:

1. Note with satisfaction the report by the Executive Director on the implementation of its decision 19/16, on biosafety;

2. Request the Executive Director to develop multi-year regional biosafety programmes to support the review, update and implementation of the UNEP International Technical Guidelines for Safety in Biotechnology in view of rapid changes and developments in the field of modern biotechnology and in

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the context of the provisions and work programmes developed for implementation of the protocol on biosafety being developed under the Convention on Biological Diversity;

3. Request the Executive Director to continue mobilizing resources, including through the Global Environment Facility, for support to developing countries and countries with economies in transition to prepare effective national biosafety frameworks in the context of the UNEP International Technical Guidelines for Safety in Biotechnology as well as the protocol on biosafety to the Convention on Biological Diversity;

4. Request the Executive Director to continue promoting greater awareness and subregional/regional cooperation in the enhancement of capacities for exchange/supply of information on safety in biotechnology through maintaining and enhancing the International Register on Biosafety;

5. Note with appreciation the support provided from the Global Environment Facility to the Pilot Biosafety Enabling Activity Project and invite the Global Environment Facility to continue to provide support to developing countries and countries with economies in transition for capacity-building on issues related to biosafety, following the completion of the pilot project;

6. Request the Executive Director to support the establishment of subregional and regional biosafety focal points in collaboration with the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity and other relevant organizations, as a complement to the Biosafety Clearing-house.

I. INTRODUCTION

1. Recognizing that biotechnology can contribute substantively to the improvement of agriculture, fisheries, forestry, health care and environmental management, Governments represented at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, held in Rio de Janeiro in June 1992, undertook to consider international cooperation on biotechnology and relevant safety aspects in order to maximize the benefits associated with biotechnology while minimizing its potential risks. 1/ That commitment includes: sharing experience, capacity-building and international agreement on principles for safety.

2. Biotechnology and related biosafety aspects are also important features of the Convention Biological Diversity. One issue of particular concern in this context is the use and release of living modified organisms resulting from modern biotechnology that may have adverse impact on the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity. Indeed, article 8(g) of the Convention provides that each contracting party shall, as far as possible and as appropriate, establish or maintain means to regulate, manage or control the risks associated with the use and release of living modified organisms resulting from biotechnology which are likely to have adverse environmental impact that could affect the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity, taking also into account the risks to human health. In addition, article 19, paragraph 3, of the Convention provides that the parties shall consider the need for and modalities of a protocol setting out appropriate procedures, including, in particular, advance informed agreement, in the field of the safe transfer, handling and use of any living modified organism resulting from biotechnology that may have adverse effect on the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity. Furthermore, paragraph 4 of the same article states that each party is obliged directly, or by requiring any natural or legal person under its jurisdiction providing the organisms referred to in article 19, paragraph 3, to provide any available information about the use and safety regulations required by that party in handling such organisms, as well as any available information on the potential adverse impact of the specific organisms concerned to the party into which those organisms are to be introduced.

3. While the Conference of the Parties to the Convention was examining how to implement the article 19, paragraph 3, the Governing Council in its decision 18/36 affirmed the desirability of UNEP contributing to international efforts on biosafety, including through the development of International Technical Guidelines for Safety in Biotechnology, while avoiding duplication with the work of the other organizations, in particular the negotiation of a protocol on biosafety under the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity.

1/ See chapter 16 of Agenda 21 (Report of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, Rio de Janeiro, 3-14 June 1992, A/CONF.151/26/Rev.1 (Vol. I and Vol. I/Corr.1, Vol. II, Vol. III and Vol. III/Corr.1)) (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.93.I.8 and corrigenda), Vol. I: Resolutions Adopted by the Conference, resolution 1, annex II).

4. At its second meeting, held in Jakarta in November 1995, the Conference of the Parties to the Convention, through its decision II/5, stressed the importance of the urgent finalization of the UNEP International Technical Guidelines for Safety in Biotechnology and acknowledged that they could contribute to the development and implementation of a protocol on biosafety without prejudicing the development and conclusion of such a protocol. The Conference further noted that the Guidelines may be used as an interim mechanism during the development of national capacities to assess and manage risks, establish adequate information system and develop expert human resource in biotechnology.

5. The Guidelines were then developed through a series of seven regional and subregional workshops on the basis of common elements and principles derived from relevant national, regional and international instruments, regulations and guidelines. The UNEP International Technical Guidelines for safety in Biotechnology were adopted at a global consultation held in Cairo in December 1995. They are based on the premise that adequate mechanisms for risk management and capacity-building through, inter alia, the exchange of information and the use of the Guidelines at the national, regional and international levels can contribute significantly to safety in biotechnology.

6. At its third meeting, held in Buenos Aires in November 1996, the Conference of the Parties to the Convention welcomed the finalization and adoption of the UNEP Guidelines. Reiterating the view that they constitute a useful complement in the development and implementation of a protocol on biosafety, the Conference also requested the Global Environment Facility (GEF) to provide financial resources to developing country parties to the Convention for capacity-building in biosafety, including capacity-building for the implementation of the UNEP Guidelines. 2/

7. It is against this background that the Governing Council adopted its decision 19/16 of 7 February 1997, on biosafety. It is also in the light of the foregoing that a number of countries made requests to UNEP for scientific and technical support, including financial assistance through GEF, to enable them undertake capacity-building activities pertinent to the implementation of relevant aspects of article 8(g) of the Convention. The activities envisaged would entail the development of national biosafety frameworks to facilitate implementation of relevant international biosafety guidelines and/or any biosafety agreement(s) under the Convention on Biological Diversity.

8. Since a number of issues pertaining to biosafety are yet to be agreed upon in the protocol on biosafety currently under negotiation, it is not yet possible to have a full understanding of the kinds of assistance that countries might need towards addressing biosafety issues and future implementation of biosafety agreements. Following discussions between UNEP, the GEF secretariat, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the World Bank, the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity and the GEF Scientific and Technical Advisory Panel (STAP), it was agreed that the use of an enabling activity framework to assist countries to first of all

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2/ See decisions III/9, para. 2 (a), and III/20 of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity, as contained in document UNEP/CBD/COP/3/38, annex II.

make a quick initial assessment of the state-of-play in the country concerned on matters of biosafety, accompanied by a global awareness enhancing initiative on biotechnology and related biosafety aspects, given the central importance of the these issues for the Convention and the potential longer-term operational implications for GEF, was the best way to proceed on the issue at the time.

9. Accordingly, at its meeting held from 4 to 6 November 1997, the GEF Council approved the UNEP/GEF Pilot Biosafety Enabling Activity Project, consisting of a national-level component (amounting to $1,797,000) and a global-level component (amounting to $765,000). In essence, the pilot project aims at providing GEF, the Conference of the Parties to the Convention, the Governing Council, countries, international organizations, non-governmental organizations and the private sector with a much clearer understanding and appreciation of the kinds of assistance countries might need towards addressing biosafety issues and future implementation of biosafety agreement(s) under the Convention on Biological Diversity, while recognizing that there is an urgent need to undertake awareness-raising programmes about: (i) the importance of biotechnology; and (ii) capacity-building requirements for safety in biotechnology and related biosafety issues.

10. In paragraph 6 (a) of its decision 19/16, the Governing Council requested the Executive Director, subject to the availability of financial resources, to continue to promote the implementation of the UNEP International Technical Guidelines for Safety in Biotechnology, particularly in developing countries, by carrying out such activities at the international, subregional and regional levels developed in consultation with the involved parties and organizations.

II. ACHIEVEMENTS

A. Implementation of the Pilot Biosafety Enabling Activity Project

11. A number of national biosafety proposals and a medium-sized project proposal were formulated and submitted to GEF for support to developing countries and countries with economies in transition for the development of their national biosafety mechanisms, incorporating various biosafety activities at national level that would also facilitate the promotion of subregional, regional and global cooperation in key aspects of biosafety and biotechnology and the application of biotechnology products.

12. Three UNEP/GEF bilateral meetings were held, in March, June and September 1997, during which, among other things, 18 national biosafety proposals and a medium-sized global biosafety project proposal encompassing support to regional workshops on biosafety, were presented by UNEP to GEF for funding. Subsequently, the GEF Council, at its meeting held from 4 to 6 November 1997, considered and approved the proposals as a single package under the title "Pilot Biosafety Enabling Activity Project", for implementation over the period from April 1998 to March 1999. The pilot project consisted of two components, namely, a national-level component and a global-level component, as described below.

1. National-level component

13. The national-level component of the project, with funding in the amount of $1,797,000, provides for assistance for the preparation of national biosafety frameworks by the following 18 countries: Bolivia, Bulgaria, Cameroon, China, Cuba, Egypt, Hungary, Kenya, Malawi, Mauritania, Mauritius, Namibia, Pakistan, Poland, Russian Federation, Tunisia, Uganda and Zambia. The 18 participating countries vary in size, geographical location, level of socio-economic development and the stage of preparation of their national biodiversity strategies and action plans. Funding allocations concerning the subprojects took these attributes into consideration. Over a period of one year (April 1998-March 1999), the countries are embarking on various activities towards the preparation of their national biosafety frameworks using the UNEP International Technical Guidelines for Safety in Biotechnology as a guide.

2. Global-level component

14. The global-level component of the project, with funding in the amount of $765,000, provides support to regional workshops on biosafety. This component has been executed in collaboration with the Information Resource on the Release of Organisms into the Environment (IRRO). Under this component, two back-to-back regional workshops on biosafety were held in 1998 in each of the following regions: Latin America and the Caribbean (Havana, 26-30 October); Central and Eastern Europe (Bled, Slovenia, 11-15 November); Africa (Nairobi, 23-27 November); and Asia and the Pacific (New Delhi, India, 7-11 December).

15. The purpose of the regional workshops was to promote a greater awareness, understanding and appreciation of biosafety and biotechnology issues by countries, in particular developing countries and countries with economies in transition. The workshops promoted the exchange of views and information on biosafety by countries, organizations, the scientific community, relevant non-governmental organizations and the private sector (in particular the bio-industry). Their aim was to facilitate the preparation and implementation of effective national biosafety frameworks within the context of the implementation of the UNEP International Technical Guidelines for Safety in Biotechnology and/or any future legal instrument(s) on biosafety, such as the protocol on biosafety currently under negotiation by the Open-ended Ad Hoc Working Group on Biosafety within the framework of the Convention on Biological Diversity.

16. The workshops provided a forum for the consideration of issues related to the assessment and management of risks associated with living modified organisms (LMOs)/organisms with novel traits (ONTs) resulting from biotechnology, including the assessment of their environmental impacts, with a view to improving biosafety. The workshops also focused on the issues related with transboundary transfer of LMOs, including appropriate mechanisms and modalities for the supply and exchange of information regarding biosafety. They also addressed issues pertinent to capacity-building requirements to enhance safety in biotechnology at the national, regional and global levels.

3. Outputs of the project

17. Outputs of the project will include reports of the regional workshops, as well as 18 country reports on national biosafety frameworks. In addition, a composite synthesis report encompassing the entire Pilot Biosafety Enabling Activity Project will be prepared.

B. Progress made in the implementation of the UNEP International Technical Guidelines for Safety in Biotechnology

18. The UNEP International Technical Guidelines for Safety in Biotechnology, published in April 1996 in all the official languages of the United Nations, have been widely distributed to Governments, institutions and organizations, including non-governmental organizations and the biotechnology industry. They were also made available at relevant intergovernmental meetings held in 1996 including the first meeting of the Open-ended Ad Hoc Working Group on Biosafety, held in Aarhus, Denmark from 22 to 26 July 1996, the second meeting of the Subsidiary Body for Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice under the Convention on Biological Diversity, held in Montreal from 2 to 6 September 1996, and the third meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity, held in Buenos Aires from 4 to 15 November 1996.

19. Progress made in the implementation of the UNEP International Technical Guidelines for Safety in Biotechnology and related capacity-building requirements has been duly conveyed to the Governing Council at its nineteenth session, the Commission on Sustainable Development at its fifth session, the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity at its third and fourth meetings and the Open-ended Ad Hoc Working Group on Biosafety at its fourth and fifth meetings.

20. In the margins of the fourth meeting of the Open-ended Ad Hoc Working Group on Biosafety, held in Montreal in February 1998, UNEP convened a workshop at which the details of the UNEP/GEF Pilot Biosafety Enabling Activity Project were presented and discussed. Delegates from the 18 countries participating in the project, as well as other participants, including those from non-governmental organizations and the private sector, attended the workshop.

21. Another workshop was staged during the fourth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity, held in Bratislava in May 1998. It offered participants an opportunity to exchange views on the practical aspects of the implementation of the national and regional components of the project.

22. Likewise, during the fifth meeting of the Open-ended Ad Hoc Working Group on Biosafety, a UNEP workshop was again held to brief the delegates on the UNEP/GEF project. The workshop was very well attended (over 200 people), and eight of the 18 countries participating in the project gave excellent presentation of progress made to date in their preparation of national biosafety frameworks under the national-level component.

23. In the light of the experience gained and lessons learned by countries, organizations and private sector (in particular bio-industry), in the application of the UNEP Guidelines, there will be a need for the review and update of the Guidelines, taking also into consideration the provisions of the eventual protocol on biosafety.

C. International Register on Biosafety

24. The International Register on Biosafety (IRB), launched in July 1996, has been placed on the Internet and can be located at the following address: http://www.unep.org/unep/program/natres/biodiv/irb/welcome.htm. The IRB serves as a mechanism for the implementation of the UNEP Guidelines for the purpose of exchange of specific information between biosafety focal points and the exchange of general information about national biosafety mechanisms, including information on biosafety guidelines, regulations, notification schemes and approvals given for the marketing of products of modern biotechnology, etc. The Register facilitates exchange of general information about generic research of value to risk assessment and risk management. The Register recognizes the need to avoid duplication and enhances synergy and complementarity through linkages with existing relevant databases such as the Biosafety Information Network and Advisory Services (BINAS) of the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) and BioTrack of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), among others. Consultations were undertaken between UNEP and relevant organizations (including UNIDO and OECD) to enhance synergy and complementarity of the information contained in the international databases, including BINAS, BioTrack and BIOBIN (a cooperative resource on regulatory issues in biotechnology developed between OECD and UNIDO). A joint demonstration of the built-in interlinkages among the UNEP/OECD/UNIDO Web-sites was made during the fourth meeting of the Open-ended Ad Hoc Working Group on Biosafety. The Register was also featured during the regional workshops on biosafety as one of the global mechanisms and modalities for supply and exchange of biosafety information.

25. IRB could thus facilitate exchange of information on living modified organisms (LMOs)/genetically modified organisms (GMOs)/organisms with novel traits (ONTs), as well as information on subregional, regional and global activities on biosafety.

26. A list of over 100 national biosafety focal points has been posted on the Register, which is being updated, as appropriate, as and when more Governments and organizations submit the details of their focal points. The results of a UNEP survey on the implementation of the UNEP Guidelines conducted for presentation at the International Workshop to Follow up on the UNEP International Technical Guidelines for Safety in Biotechnology, held in Buenos Aires on 31 October and 1 November 1996, are also posted on the IRB Web-site. It contains biosafety information contributed by Governments in line with the UNEP Guidelines.

27. Pursuant to paragraph 6 (c) of Governing Council decision 19/16, it is proposed to hold the second international workshop on the state of the art of the implementation of the UNEP Guidelines in June/July 1999 after the adoption of the protocol on biosafety in Cartegena, Colombia, in February 1999. Such timing would allow the workshop to take into consideration the

results of the UNEP/GEF Pilot Biosafety Enabling Activity Project, the outcome of a workshop on biosafety regulatory capacity-building to be held in Mexico City from 13 to 15 January 1999, and the provisions of the protocol on biosafety.

III. OTHER BIOSAFETY ACTIVITIES

28. Pursuant to decision 19/16, the UNEP programme of work for the biennium 1998-1999 included the following biosafety/biotechnology activities, among others:

(a) Support for training, research, information exchange and pilot activities encompassing awareness-raising through trained personnel in biotechnology safety and environmentally sound biotechnology and inventorying of transferable environmentally sound biotechnology;

(b) Training in biotechnology safety and environmentally sound biotechnology, including the holding a regional symposium on agrotechnologies based on biological nitrogen fixation for desert agriculture, implemented by Environmental Studies and Research Unit (ESRU), Faculty of Agriculture, Cairo University;

(c) Support to Cairo Microbiological Resources Centre (MIRCEN) for training workshops on microbial biofertilizers and plant molecular biology and biotechnology;

(d) Training in taxonomy for ex situ and in situ conservation, which included the provision of support for regional training under the project entitled "Partnership in Capacity-building for Sustainable National Plant Genetic Resources Programmes", implemented by the International Plant Genetic Resources Institute (IPGRI);

(e) A UNEP/FAO project on information dissemination and training for technology transfer in domestic animal genetic resources".

29. At the end of the fifth meeting of the Open-ended Ad Hoc Working Group on Biosafety, held in Montreal from 17 to 28 August 1998, a study tour of sites of transgenic crops in the United States was arranged by the American Seed Trade Association (ASTA) on behalf of the bio-industry for the 18 countries participating in the UNEP/GEF pilot project. The study tour was undertaken by 14 countries over the period from 29 August to 5 September 1998.

IV. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

30. Governing Council decision 19/16 on biosafety has been implemented to a very large extent in spite of financial constraints and the short period over which the UNEP/GEF Pilot Biosafety Enabling Activity Project had to be undertaken.

31. Both Agenda 21 and the Convention on Biological Diversity are now recognized as the principal vehicles and instruments for international cooperation with regard to issues of conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity, and the equitable sharing of benefits derived therefrom, including through the development and application of modern biotechnology. When a protocol on biosafety is concluded and adopted in Cartegena in February 1999, it will constitute another important instrument for international cooperation on issues related to biosafety.

32. Over the past five years since the Convention on Biological Diversity entered into force, UNEP has played a significant role at the global, regional and national levels through various complementary initiatives in support of the work of the Convention Secretariat and the Conference of the Parties, as well as the work of the Open-ended Ad Hoc Working Group on Biosafety, thus facilitating the implementation of the Convention. The development of the UNEP International Guidelines for Safety in Biotechnology, and activities under the UNEP/GEF Pilot Biosafety Enabling Activity Project are but a few examples.

33. The protocol on biosafety will be a vital vehicle through which international initiatives on biosafety can be focused and synergized at the national, subregional, regional and global levels, in respect of capacity-building efforts in the priority areas of prime importance for the effective implementation of articles 8(g) and 19, paragraph 4, of the Convention, as well as the provisions of the protocol.

34. Particular areas of capacity-building requiring international coordination and focus include: the development of national/subregional/regional capacities to assess and manage risks; establishment of adequate systems for supply and exchange of information on biosafety; and development of a critical mass of expert human resources in modern biotechnology, at the national, subregional and regional levels.

35. As an implementing agency of GEF, and in collaboration with UNDP, the World Bank and other partners, UNEP has a unique mandate and a significant as well as catalytic role to play in this regard. Through its programmes and the coordination of international initiatives on biosafety in support of environmentally sound development and application of biotechnology, and by mobilizing scientific, technical and other support, including financial resources through GEF, to developing countries and countries with economies in transition, it is envisaged that UNEP will undertake specific types of projects which are linked to UNEP's strategic role and areas of expertise, to respond to country needs as well as subregional and regional priorities for capacity-building requirements for safety in biotechnology.

36. The lack of a comprehensive assessment of the state of the art in safety in biotechnology at the global, regional and subregional levels was evident during regional workshops on biosafety and the preparation of national biosafety frameworks. There is a need for a comprehensive analytical assessment of existing biosafety regulations/guidelines and the status of safety in biotechnology globally. The assessment of the status of biosafety will contribute to increased regional and global cooperation and the achievement of the objectives of the Convention on Biological Diversity, and would provide an important tool for obtaining objectively assessed

information that may facilitate the work of the Subsidiary Body for Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice under the Convention on Biological Diversity in the area of biosafety, as well as the biosafety protocol process, through the proposed Intergovernmental Committee on the Biosafety Protocol (ICBP) and the Conference of the Parties. The results of this assessment should be made available through the same mechanism developed for the full Global Biodiversity Assessment report.

37. Following the completion of the Pilot Biosafety Enabling Activity Project and the adoption of the protocol on biosafety, there will be a need for countries to have in place national biosafety frameworks that will facilitate their implementation of the provisions of the protocol. Accordingly, GEF should be requested to provide financial support to additional countries to prepare their national biosafety frameworks or to undertake relevant capacity-building initiatives in the priority focal areas cited in paragraph 34 above.

38. There is also a need to establish subregional/regional biosafety focal points for the exchange and supply of expertise and information on issues related to safety in biotechnology.